



BULLETIN No 33

WHAT THE SHEEP MUST BE

— BY —

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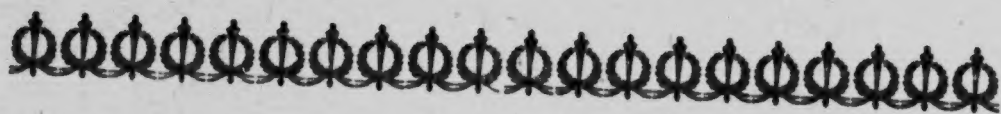
Head of Leicester sheep

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Lincoln Sheep
From the Dominion live-stock branch



WHAT THE SHEEP MUST BE

Sheep breeding is decreasing throughout the entire world, and the province of Quebec is no exception. Our flock once numbered over 1,000,000 heads where it now numbers only 600,000. In 1901 there were 396 sheep per 1000 inhabitants, in 1911 there were only 316.

The decrease is due to different reasons: diseases on poorly drained lands, lack of good fences, destruction by dogs and other animals and the lack of technical advice.

The poorly organised market both for mutton and wool has often discouraged good breeders.

Since the last few years the Dominion and Provincial Dept's of agriculture seem to have made sheep raising more prosperous. The high prices of mutton, wool production facilities of raising, the utilisation of poor dry lands, the destruction of weeds, the production of a rich easily kept manure are reasons which decide the farmer to give more attention to sheep breeding.

First the farmer must find out the type of mutton he must produce. The type of mutton demanded by the market is the one to raise.

THE MARKET DEMANDS

1.—Young animals, well developed, fleshy with an even distribution of fat, not deposited in lumps; with the quick maturing English breeds of sheep : (southdown, shropshire, hampshire, oxford, leicester, etc) one can easily satisfy the market on this point. The lambs of all breeds weigh 75 to 100 at 9½ months old.

The production of this lamb is advantageous because the younger the animal the less the lb. of meat will cost.

2.—Animals giving good returns and of good conformation. Returns depend upon the state of condition but also upon conformation which must permit the production of cuts the most in demand and paid the highest price by the consumer. The leg and loin (porter-house) are much in demand. One would be safe in saying that the hind quarters and all that is back of the three first ribs have a much higher value than the fore-quarters.

Apart from the market exigencies, the breeder will use for breeding, animals of a healthy and vigorous constitution Wool, though being of secondary importance must not be neglected, and must receive due consideration in selecting breeding-stock.

We shall divide this lecture in two parts :

1.—What conformation in relation to meat production must be.

2.—What the fleece must be.



Diagram showing relative of different cuts

gigot: leg.
 filet: loin or porter-house.
 côtes: ribs.
 poitrine: breast.
 jambe: fore-leg.
 épaule: shoulder or chuck
 cou: neck.

CONFORMATION

By standing in front of, by making a step towards or away from; or a step to one side of the sheep one can easily examine the head, neck and chest of the sheep. The head must be small and fine carrying two small ears. A small clean head indicates a good quality of bone (fine) and indirectly a high percentage of net weight in relation to live weight. The fineness of head must not exclude: 1.—a wide, strong, short, jaw which characters a good organ of mastication. 2.—well opened nostrils, indicating free respiration.

The eyes without being too salient must be well opened.

The look must be quick, clean, calm and not agitated, nor frightened for the look is a general analysis of the character, one will complete the examination of the eye by that of the mucuous membrane of the eye-lid which must not be too red nor too pale.

The neck which gives meat of poor quality shall be short, thick and round. The neck should give a round cut rather than oval. Wrinkles under the throat and a large dewlap are undesirable.

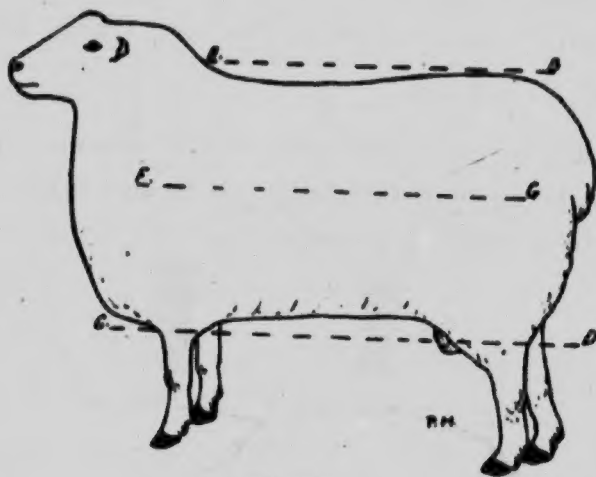
The breast must be wide which is an evident proof of a wide chest as well as a complete easy movement of the heart and lungs. The breast must be wide the shoulders must be well apart but not salient; they must be well padded with flesh in front and behind and blend imperceptibly into the neck and withers. The breast being wide, the legs shall be well distanced next to the body. They should be also well spaced in their lower part. Well set straight legs, are to be looked for.

From a side-view one can examine the length breath and depth of the body and the limbs.

It is prudent to first examine the general conformation of the

body, which is best done by applying a yard-stick or straight edge to the body of the sheep or ram.

1.—From the withers to the tail-head; one can judge the top-line.



Side-view.
a-b Top-line
c-d Under-line
f-g side-line

2.—From the lowest part of the sternum to the stifle-joint; one will judge the under-line.

3.—On each side from the point of the shoulder to the point of the thigh; one can judge the side-lines.

The straighter these lines, the more contact will there be with the yard-stick and more perfect shall be the conformation. The straight top-line does away with the convex and concave back. The straight under-line indicates the width of chest and hind quarters (pelvis), as well as an abdomen of normal size.

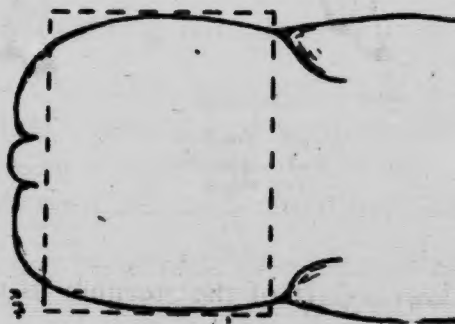
It is now easier to examine :

1.—The length of barrel length of ribs and especially the length of rump which indicates the width of legs.

2.—The depth of barrel, between the top and under-line, indicating the depth of chest and the good development without exaggeration of the digestive organs.

3.—The breadth of barrel between the lateral-lines. The whole body should be wide, broad at the withers between the shoulders, the vertebrae not being salient; wide at the loin, which will furnish a nice fleshy chop.

Making a step or two backwards we will examine the length of the limbs which being of little value will be very short; the barrel being as near the ground as possible.

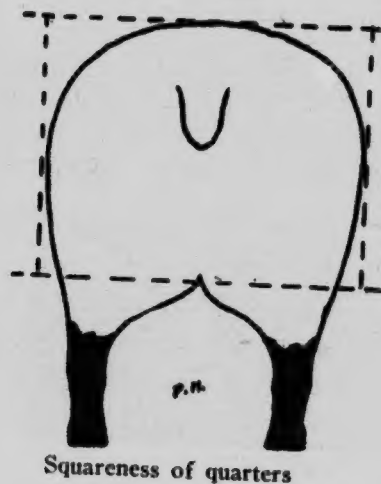


One must examine the sheep from the rear. The sheep or ram must be wide at the hook-bones and pin-bones (hips and buttocks). Looking over the animal the rump must not resemble a trapezoid, the wide base of which would be at the hips and the narrow base at the buttocks.

On the contrary the 4 lines bordering the rump must circumscribe a real square.

Another square should equally be presented by the line of the rump and the legs.

The leg must therefore be fleshy and well let down.



THE FLEECE

The fleece must be examined or judged according to quantity and quality.

a) WEIGHT OR QUANTITY

There is no better or more certain method of judging the fleece than to cut and weigh it. A wise plan for the breeder would be to weigh each fleece and keep as breeding-stock the sheep which have given the heaviest fleece, providing they are also of the right conformation for meat production.

But one can not always cut and weigh the fleece (when a ram is bought for example), one should be able to appreciate the weight of the fleece by its density, extension and length of fiber.

1.—Length of wool. One can easily appreciate the length by pulling a lock or a fiber and measuring it after having stretched it. But it must be remembered that the fibers are not of the same length on the different parts of the body; it is very long on the shoulders and back and much shorter on the limbs. The time elapsed since the last shearing must also be taken into consideration.

2.—The density, that is its thickness, compactness, the larger the number of fibers to the square inch, the heavier and denser will be the fleece. The density is extraordinary for certain breeds. It is estimated, that the fleece of the Merinos contains 40,000 to 45,000 fibers to the square inch. Whatever breed is adopted, dense fleece must be looked for in the breeding stock, for density is in relation not only to weight but also fineness of fibers.

Density is appreciated by sight. One can easily notice a dense fleece by a good look; but a touch with the hand is still better. The fleece will be denser according to the greater resistance felt by the hand when laid flat on the back of the sheep.

3.—Surface of fleece. The fleece of the breeding stock will extend well under the body, the belly being well covered. It is evident that weight is in proportion to the surface covered by the fleece.

b) QUALITY

To make a perfect selection, as to quality of the wool, an old expert would be necessary. The choice will be sufficient, if the breeders look for the following qualities :

1.—The fineness of fibers, that is the tenuity of the fiber, small diameter.

The commercial experts use a micrometer to judge the fineness of diameter but one can easily judge it by laying it on a black cloth.



Leicester Ram



Shropshire Ram

From the Dominion Live-stock branch

2.—Undulation. Wool is always more or less undulated or spirally. Although this might be discussed it is generally estimated that the fineness and elasticity are proportionate to the number of fibers to the square inch.

3.—Uniformity of fiber; it is important that the diameter be uniform throughout the length of the fiber. It happens when a sheep is unthrifty that the diameter becomes reduced in places. The wool becomes weak, and has less value. When the breeding-stock is sound and thrifty (others should always be discarded) there is little danger of this irregularity of diameter.

4.—Resistance and elasticity. These are essential qualities for the manufacturer, and it is readily estimated that an undulated wool of uniform diameter is resistant and elastic. There is still another means, the wool is lubricated, oiled by the yolk, greasy matter secreted by the sebaceous glands of the skin. The fiber will be, supple, elastic, and strong according to the quantity and quality of the yolk, by which it has been lubricated.

One can easily notice the abundance of yolk; its quality will be judged according to its whiteness and greasyness.